

NEEDLESSLY BLINDED FOR LIFE

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There are two principal causes of blindness which are preventable. Through ignorance or negligence of those interested with the care of the new-born babe, ophthalmia neonatorum or babies' sore eyes, causes from 22 to 25 per cent of all the blindness among the pupils of the Texas School for the Blind; while trachoma causes between 7 and 9 per cent. The exact figures for the sessions 1917-1918 and 1918-1919 are as follows:

OPHTHALMIA NEONATORUM.

	Oph. Neo.	Total Enrollment.	Percentage.
1917-18	69	260	26.54
1918-19	61	232	26.54

TRACHOMA.

	Trachoma.	Total Enrollment.	Percentage.
1917-18	23	260	8.84
1918-19	17	232	7.33

Combining these two tables we see that 92 children, out of an enrollment of 260 for the session 1916-17, or 35.38 per cent, were blind for these two causes; while the session of 1917-18 showed figures slightly different, namely, 78 pupils out of an enrollment of 232, or 33.62 per cent.

Now, if the parents had been told that the eyes of these children could have been saved, would they not think that somebody was guilty of criminal negligence?

Ophthalmia neonatorum, sometimes called infantile ophthalmia or babies' sore eyes, is the most prolific cause of blindness. A child may be born with eyes in normal condition, but if on the third or fourth day one or both eyes become inflamed, swollen or red and show a mattery discharge, the conclusion can be drawn that the child has ophthalmia neonatorum, and unless the right treatment is administered at once sight will be destroyed in a short time. If the eyes of the new-born baby should show any signs of inflammation within the first few days the attendant physician should be notified at once. For a day or two neglect of this disease will allow it to fully develop, and then the most skillful treatment may fail to prevent the destruction of sight. The laws of the State of Massachusetts require that the nurse, relative or other attendant upon birth of the infant shall report in writing to the board of health within six hours after any inflammation has been noticed the fact that such inflammation exists, and failure to do so is punishable by fine; and after receiving such notice the board of health immediately orders proper treatment.

It should not be overlooked that the discharge from the eyes of these cases is contagious, and if perchance it gets into the eyes of other persons it will cause a similarly destructive inflammation. Therefore, the greatest care should be taken to burn all cloths or cotton used in cleansing

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the eyes, and the hands of the attendant should be washed and the towel used for drying the hands should not be used for any other purpose.

This infection of the baby's eyes is due to germ-bearing matter getting into the eyes during or shortly after birth. Usually about the third day—sometimes a little earlier and sometimes a few days later—the baby's eyelids become swollen and a yellowish secretion is noticed to be discharging from the eyes. This is the danger sign, and skilled medical attention must be obtained without delay.

A prevention of the disease is to drop into each eye a two per cent solution of nitrate of silver. This should be done by a competent nurse or a doctor. When such a simple prophylactic can prevent this dreadful disease with its fearful consequences, why should it be neglected to drop it into the eyes of every new-born babe? A little extra care, a drop in each eye when the baby is born—thus two minutes of time so spent may save seventy-five years of blindness.

Trachoma, or granular conjunctivitis, usually called granulated lids, is quite infectious and there is no preventive, except by isolating the patient to prevent others from taking it. By using a common towel or wash basin, this disease spreads to whole families. One pupil in school with trachoma may infect, by indirect ways, his playmates. This disease is considered of such grave importance by the United States Immigration Bureau that any immigrant found with this eye trouble is taken to isolate the cases, this disease spreads through the whole community. The treatment should be by a competent oculist or physician who understands ophthalmic troubles. It does not mean by isolating the patient that there is danger of spreading the disease like mumps or measles; but rather to keep the patient from using the same wash-basin, towel or other utensil which others use. The patient rubbing his eyes and then shaking hands with others may communicate the disease to others.

While the foregoing is written, not from a medical nor professional standpoint, but entirely in the popular vein, it is hoped that the precautions noted will result in some good.



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Little souls imprisoned, always groping in the dark,
They may hear the wind's soft whisper and may hear the streamlet run,
They may hear the breakers booming, and may hear the singing lark,
But they never see the flowers lift their blossoms to the sun;
They may never see the whitecaps like a white-maned cavalcade
Rushing shoreward in the breezes, never see the blinking stars;
They sit silent in the darkness always groping, half afraid;
Carelessness has doomed their souls to always be behind the bars.

Carelessness and ignorance have like vile witches touched each lid,
And with that touch went the daylight, went the hillsides and the trees,
By that touch the azure glory of the arching sky was hid,
Hid the sweetness of the blossoms gently bending in the breeze;
They may never see the features of the mother bent above
The white bed where they are lying, see the love-light in her eyes;
They may never see the father whom their arms entwine and love,
See the round moon ride above them when the perfumed daylight dies.

All the pity of their blindness lies in this: They might have seen,
Might have climbed the hills of morning and have watched the rivers
run,
Might have watched the wind-stirred meadows run in blossomed billows
green,
And have followed pink rose petals down warm breezes in the sun;
All the pity of their blindness is that Carelessness came by,
And that Ignorance came with her to the deed she bent to do,
And they wiped the joy of life out, wiped out sea and plain and sky,—
Children yet unborn are reaching out beseeching hands to you.

(The above poem was written especially for the Health Magazine by
Judd Mortimer Lewis of Houston.)

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